

Ambassador Sichan Siv  
United States Representative to the United Nations  
Economic and Social Council  
Remarks at the International Center's  
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AS DELIVERED

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Thank you very much Ambassador Danforth<sup>1</sup> for those kind words of introduction and the honor of receiving this award<sup>2</sup> from you.

There is an old saying in Missouri that behind a good Cambodian, there are three great Texans. (*Laughter.*) Two are named President Bush: “41” and “43” that is! (*Laughter.*) Both have bestowed on me their trust and confidence, for which I am eternally grateful. The third one is my wife Martha from Pampa, Texas. She is everything to me and simply the best. (*Applause.*)

It is my good fortune to have journeyed here on a challenging road. While growing up in Cambodia, my mother used to tell me, “Never give up hope, no matter what happens.” Hope kept me alive in the Killing Fields where I never stopped dreaming of liberty.

In the words of Robert Goddard<sup>3</sup>, “*It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow.*” Reality came to me in 1976 when I began my new life as a free man in Wallingford, Connecticut. After working in an orchard picking apples and eating enough of them to last a lifetime, (*laughter*) I came to New York to drive a Checker cab. A friend said that if I could survive forced labor camps, I could take Manhattan. (*Laughter.*)

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<sup>1</sup> **John C. Danforth** was elected Attorney General of Missouri in 1968 and reelected in 1972. He was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1976 and reelected in 1982 and 1988. In September 1999, he was appointed counsel by Attorney General Janet Reno to investigate the federal raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas. In September 2001 President George W. Bush appointed him as Special Envoy for Peace to Sudan. He was nominated to serve as President Bush's Representative to the United Nations in June 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The “Award of Excellence” honors distinguished foreign born individuals who have made significant contributions to American Life. **Past recipients include:** Arrigo Cipriani (Italy), Alistair Cook (England), Nobel Laureate Leo Esaki (Japan), Diane von Furstenberg (Belgium), Peter Jennings (Canada), Henry A. Kissinger (Germany), Evelyn Lauder (Austria), Yo-Yo Ma (China), Philippe de Montebello (France), Zygmunt Nagorski (Poland), Nobel Laureate Arno A. Penzias (Germany), Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel (Romania),

<sup>3</sup> **Robert Hutchins Goddard** (1882-1945) was a pioneer of modern rocketry. He launched the first liquid-fuelled rocket on March 16, 1926 at Auburn, Massachusetts. In memory of his brilliant scientific career, NASA established the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland on May 1, 1959.

In 1981 I met Carlton Mitchell<sup>4</sup> while working on Wall Street. He was a mentor to me. I later went to help the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief<sup>5</sup> set up its new refugee program. I thought to myself: *"Here I am a Buddhist, married to a Presbyterian. I came to America through a Catholic agency. I have worked for the Lutheran and Episcopal churches. How ecumenical can one be?"* (Laughter.)

In 1989, 13 years after my escape from Cambodia, I became the first American of Asian ancestry to serve as Deputy Assistant to the President of the United States. That was a great credit to President Bush 41 and to America. Before leaving New York, a friend reminded me that *"if I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere,"* including Washington. (Laughter.)

The greatest blessings in life are having a loving family, wonderful friends and good colleagues. When I came back to New York in 2001, Carlton and I linked up again after two decades. He is a true friend.

I first met Jack Danforth when we worked together on the nomination of Judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. He was the senior senator from Missouri. I was at the White House. I have had the greatest respect and admiration for him. After President Bush 43 nominated him to be my boss, we both realized that an Episcopal minister and a former Buddhist monk would make a great team (*laughter*) representing the United States at the United Nations. Jack, thank you very much for your leadership, and your friendship. (*Applause.*)

I am extremely privileged to receive this award from the International Center<sup>6</sup>. I accept on behalf of the millions of refugees and immigrants who have come here to make America the greatest country. God Bless you! And God Bless the United States of America! (*Applause.*)

This document can be obtained at [http://www.un.int/usa/04\\_198eng.pdf](http://www.un.int/usa/04_198eng.pdf).

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<sup>4</sup> **Carlton Mitchell** is Executive Director of the International Center in New York.

<sup>5</sup> **The Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief** of the Episcopal Church provides emergency relief and rehabilitation and seeks to identify and address root causes of suffering.

<sup>6</sup> **The International Center in New York** was founded in 1961 and is a privately funded language learning center for immigrants and foreign-born newcomers to New York City.